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AUTHOR	Valdman, Albert
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ABSTRACT

This article offers the pedagogical norm as an approach to dealing with linguistic variation in instructed second language learning, suggesting that an invariant target language (TL) norm, based on the planned discourse of educated and cultivated TL speakers, is both elusive and illusory as a target for learners, especially at the beginning and intermediate levels. First, the article develops the notion of a pedagogical norm. Second, it illustrates the elaboration of a pedagogical norm by applying it to arguably the most variable morphosyntactic feature of vernacular French, WH-interrogative structures. Third, it reviews an experimental study that suggests that setting as a model a simpler pedagogical norm (the "Loi de Position"), rather than the orthoepic standard norm (so-called Parisian French or Standard French) results in better auditory discrimination, less puristic attitudes toward linguistic variation, and paradoxically, closer approximation to the orthoepic norm. Finally, it concludes that constructed pedagogical norms are dynamic and offer language learners changing targets, which lead them progressively toward the full range of TL variants. (Contains 29 references.) (SM)

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The Acquisition of Sociostylistic and Sociopragmatic Variation by Instructed Second Language Learners: The Elaboration of Pedagogical Norms

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Introduction

Most second language acquisition (SLA) research has focused on the acquisition by learners of features of the target language where native speakers show invariant usage. Of course, there exists a well-represented strand of research on the variable reproduction by second language (SL) learners of invariant native speaker input: the field of research on interlanguage. A relatively new strand of SLA research has been developing which focuses on the acquisition by SL learners of the sociolinguistic and sociopragmatic variation evidenced by native speakers (Dewaele 1999; Rehner and Mougeon 1999; Sax 2000). For example, in a pseudo-longitudinal study Sax (forthcoming) investigates the acquisition on the part of university instructed learners of linguistic features characteristic of vernacular metropolitan French: the deletion of the negative *ne*, the deletion of /l/ in third person masculine subject pronouns, and interrogative morphosyntactic variants.

Most of this latter type of research has taken place in the context of Canadian immersion programs whose objective is the ultimate acquisition on the part of learners of near-native proficiency. But this goal may not be appropriate for most of the types of SL instruction, specifically classroom foreign language (FL) learning found in the United States, in view of the cultural, social, and political context. Particularly in elementary and intermediate-level courses—those in which most learners are enrolled—FL instruction is formative in nature. In addition to a modest degree of communicative ability, this type of FL instruction also must aim to impart a substantive body of knowledge about the particular FL and the cultures of the communities that use

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it, the capacity to read texts in the target language (TL), and metalinguistic and epilinguistic outcomes.

Epilinguistics concerns attitudes toward language. The recognition that all forms of speech are worthy and that there are no "primitive languages" or "corrupted dialects," unsuited for the potential uses to which a given community may wish to put them, should be an important outcome of SL instruction. Hopefully, these attitudes will guide the judgments of former SL students in their adulthood as they face the numerous language planning issues that confront today's complex multi-ethnic societies. Two such issues that concern Americans today are to what extent Spanish should be officialized and the nature of the relationship between African American Vernacular English (also termed Ebonics and Black English) and mainstream Standard American English. One way learners can come to accept the inherent worthiness of all types of language behavior is to be sensitized to the variability that exists in the TL and to become familiar with the various parameters with which it correlates.

Setting near-native speaker performance as an objective for formative SL instruction is unrealistic and reductionist (Auger and Valdman 1999). First, for the major SLs taught in the United States, there are several geographical communities and, within each, social and age groups with their own speech norms. What does it mean to speak French near-natively: to approximate the linguistic competence of a student at Laval University in Quebec City, that of a 40-year-old Parisian blue collar worker, that of an upper class retiree in Liège, Belgium? Second, native speakers do not always welcome foreigners who have acquired localized vernacular forms of speech, which are closely linked to membership in close-knit, intimate social networks. Giles and Ryan (1982) remind us that accents and dialects serve as powerful symbols of ethnic and cultural identity. Foreigners who closely conform to native vernacular norms may not be more favorably regarded by their hosts. They may instead be viewed with suspicion and be considered as having violated rules of hospitality. For example, Paul Chistophersen's (1973) describes the Englishman's reaction to an overperfect pronunciation in a foreign speaker as that of a host who sees an uninvited guest making free with his possessions.

Most FL language teachers would consider this to be a false problem, for they would adhere strictly to the standard norm. There are at least two problems with this solution. First, that norm will seldom be evident in the samples of authentic oral texts to which learners will be exposed. Second, to expose them only to highly contrived materials that adhere to the standard norm will make it difficult for them to understand authentic texts. It also denies them access to suitable models

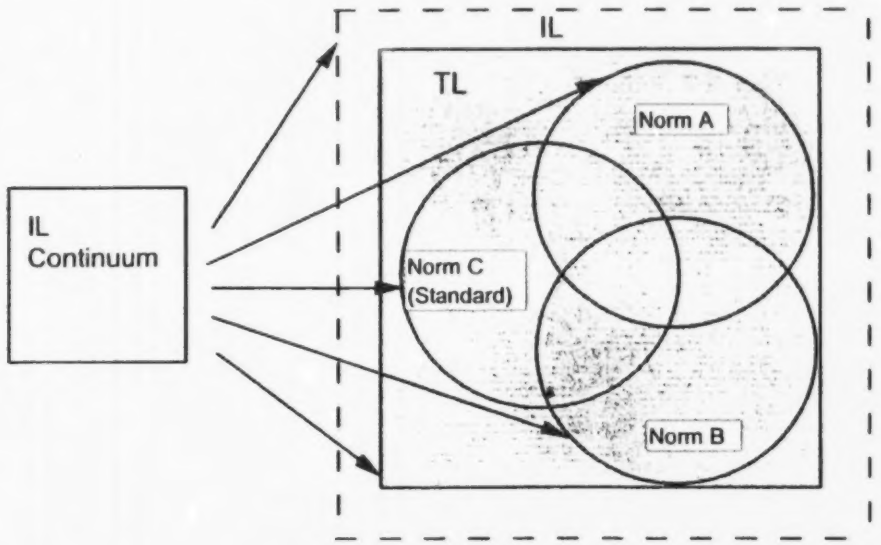
on the basis of which they may extract the rules that underlie vernacular speech. Precisely because they differ from the codified rules that characterize the standard norm, there is little evidence for these rules in instructional materials. More compatible with instructed SL learning is the construct of the pedagogical norm.

In this article, I offer the pedagogical norm as an approach to deal with linguistic variation in instructed SL learning. First, I will develop that notion. Second, I will illustrate the elaboration of a pedagogical norm by applying it to arguably the most variable morphosyntactic feature of vernacular French, WH-interrogative structures. Third, I will review an experimental study conducted with advanced instructed learners that suggests that setting as model a simpler pedagogical norm (the *Loi de Position*) rather than the orthoepic standard norm (so-called Parisian French or Standard French [SF]) results in better auditory discrimination, less puristic attitudes toward linguistic variation, and paradoxically, closer approximation to the orthoepic norm.

The Construct of a Pedagogical Norm

The construct of a pedagogical norm starts from a view that in complex linguistic communities speakers' linguistic behavior is determined by shifting orientation toward co-existent norms. It implies the rejection of a unidimensional model according to which language variation is determined by level of attention to speech and in which all social groups orient their behavior to that of a single dominant group

Figure 1
Possible orientations of IL continuum toward various TL norms



(Labov 1966). Instead, speakers will shift their norm orientation depending on a variety of factors, including the situational context and their communicative intent (Valdman 1988). This multinorm model accounts, for example, for the persistence of socially stigmatized forms (Labov 1972). It is also consonant with Milroy's social network theory (Milroy 1982), according to which the closer knit the relationships among speakers are and, as a consequence, the more multilateral their communicative interactions, the more likely the emergence of subnorms in a linguistic community. Within the framework of the multinorm model, interlinguistic continua may be viewed as vectors that are oriented toward a particular TL norm by filtering input and by controlling feedback. In naturalistic SLA, the types of communicative situations encountered by learners will determine, in large part, the norm orientation of their interlinguistic continua. In instructed learning, however, norm orientation is controlled, in large part, by the teacher and teaching materials. The elaboration of pedagogical norms represents a clearly interventionist view that contrasts with the laissez-faire attitude of misinterpreted communicatively oriented instruction illustrated by the citation following:

> Many U.S. school districts have chosen to stop short of immersion and stress "proficiency" instead. This reflects the new emphasis on communication—on what the student can *do* in the language—rather than on repetitious verb drills and grammatical analysis. "If you went into a proficiency classroom, you would see students practicing languages with the teacher and with each other," explains Maryland's Met. "They might be role-playing. You might see groups of students interviewing each other and reporting back to the class." At first, "It's usually 'Frenglish'," says Ginette Suarez, who has been teaching junior-high French in Washington, D.C., for 20 years, "but I want them to be able to express themselves without worrying about tenses and all that. I tell them, nobody in this room speaks perfect French, not even me" (Seligmann et al. 1990).

The relationship between a pedagogical norm and the orientation of the learner's interlinguistic system toward competing native norms is illustrated by Figure 1. The large gray-shaded square delimited by solid lines and labeled TL represents the totality of TL lects and subsumes all of the community's norms. The circles included in the grey-shaded areas represent the various norms of the TL community. For the sake of convenience, the model includes only the standard norm and two other competing norms, A and B. With regard to the French data I will be discussing, the norm which determines middle-class planned (formal) speech influenced by the orthography would be the

standard norm, Norm C; the norm that determines working-class speech would be Norm B; that which determines middle-class spontaneous (informal) speech would be Norm A. The large square delimited by broken lines represents the totality of deviant interlinguistic forms that fall outside of the overall system of the TL. In naturalistic SLA, interlinguistic continua are oriented broadly and may include forms that fall outside of TL. In conventional instruction, interlinguistic systems are oriented implicitly toward the standard norm. In the elaboration of a pedagogical norm the learner's productions are first oriented toward an artificial norm that, nonetheless, falls within the overall TL target that is included within the grey-shaded square of Figure 1. In subsequent phases of instruction, the learners' productions are oriented progressively and explicitly toward the standard norm by way, if necessary, of competing native norms.

A pedagogical norm is an approximation to the TL established on the basis of the following factors: (1) linguistic: the actual variable production of targeted native speakers in authentic communicative situations; (2) sociopsychological: native speakers' idealized views of their speech and the perceptions both native speakers and foreign learners have regarding expected behavior of particular FL users; (3) acquisition: relative ease of learning and use. I will illustrate the concept of pedagogical norm with a notoriously variable area of French morphosyntax, WH-interrogative structures (Valdman 1975, 1976, 1983, 1988; Fox 1989; Coveney 1996).

Application of the Pedagogical Norm to WH-Questions in French

As shown in Table 1, French offers a variety of interrogative constructions containing an interrogative pronoun or adverb (WH-interrogatives). Students of French are traditionally taught only two of these numerous WH-interrogative constructions attested in various geographical and social varieties of French: EST-CE QUE and INVERSION. The first step in the elaboration of a pedagogical norm is the establishment of baseline data on the actual behavior of native speakers. There exist two thorough sociolinguistic studies of French interrogatives whose data diverge somewhat. The older one (Behnstedt 1973) rests on a larger corpus, about 1,400 tokens, but its controls of social and stylistic variables is flawed. Behnstedt distinguishes three different situations, but the collection of the data involves analyzing radio recordings for middle-class formal style, guided interviews with 21 subjects for middle-class informal style, and conversations with truck drivers with the investigator serving as

Table 1
French WH-interrogative variant constructions

INVERSION	Quand pars-tu?	When are you leaving?
IN SITU	Tu pars quand?	
FRONTING	Quand tu pars?	
C'EST INSERTION	Quand c'est tu pars? Quand c'est que tu pars?	
EST-CE QUE INSERTION	Quand est-ce que tu pars?	
COMPLEMENT	Quand que tu pars?	
CLEFTING	C'est quand que tu pars?	

assistant driver for working-class speech. Coveney's (1996) more limited data (122 tokens of WH-interrogatives) was collected from a group of 30 subjects using the standard variationist experimental protocol involving correlation of variable production against previously identified social independent variables: socioeconomic and cultural classification, age, sex. Although his speakers were all from Picardy, there did not seem to be transfer from structures of the Picard dialect. The data in Table 2 (Behnstedt 1973; Coveney 1996) show that INVERSION is relatively rare in informal speech and that the frequency of occurrence of EST-CE QUE is subject to wide variation. (Note that INVERSION comprises both the variants containing a clitic pronoun, *Quand part-il?* 'When is he leaving? and a NP, *Quand part ton train?* 'When is your train leaving?') Basing ourselves on the more robust Behnstedt data, we may conclude that in everyday speech metropolitan French speakers most frequently use the variants FRONTING and IN SITU that are syntactically less complex at the surface structure level. However, from a sociopsychological perspective these constructions are stigmatized, as indicated in Table 3. Behnstedt's middle-class speakers underestimated their use of these two variants while, on the other hand, they overestimated the proportion of INVERSION. For example, they thought that they used that construction in about 1/3 of the cases although in their informal style they actually produced it in only 5% of the cases. On the other hand, their estimated use of the stigmatized FRONTING construction was nearly 20 percentage points below actual production.

On the basis of the criteria of status and solidarity (Giles and Ryan 1982; Ryan 1983), one may assume that educated middle-class native speakers of French would expect foreign counterparts to favor INVERSION, which is the most highly valued construction in their own

Table 2
Relative frequency of the distribution of interrogative constructions in a representative corpus of spoken French (Behnstedt 1973; Coveney 1996)

	BEHNSTEDT (in %)			COVENEY (in %)
	Working class	Informal Middle-Class	Formal Middle-Class	
IN SITU				
Tu vas où?	12	33	25	15.8
FRONTING				
Où tu vas?	36	46	10	23.8
EST-CE QUE				
Où est-ce que tu vas?	8	2	3	48.3
EST-CE QUE VARIANTS				
Où c'est que tu vas?	35	4	—	
INVERSION				
Où vas-tu?	9	5	62	9.1
	$N = 587$	$N = 446$	$N = 436$	$N = 122$

subjective norm and which they associate with planned discourse and the written medium. In other words, they expect educated foreigners to speak "better" than they do. Concerning the attitude of learners themselves, in the absence of sociopsychological evidence in this matter, invoking the French sociologist Bourdieu's notion of the linguistic market (1982), we may assume that they would favor the normative variant, INVERSION. For learners, the acquisition of a foreign language in the classroom context represents an investment for which

Table 3
Sociopsychological: speaker evaluation (middle class)

Type of Construction	Actual Use	Estimation
FRONTING	.47	.30
IN SITU	.35	.20
EST-CE QUE	.15	.19
INVERSION	.03	.30

they would expect maximum return. Thus, the second and third criteria of pedagogical norm elaboration converge to identify INVERSION as the interrogative construction most suitable for foreign learners to use from the sociolinguistic and sociopsychological standpoints.

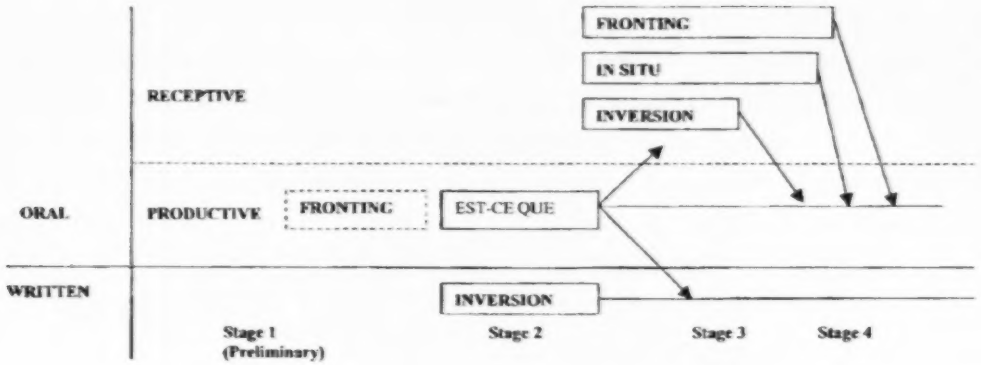
The acquisitional criterion proves difficult to apply. INVERSION is subject to numerous syntactic constraints that render its handling difficult and prone to errors. For example, INVERSION generally does not occur with the first person singular pronoun: **Quand arrivé-je*; it is also not permitted when the WH-form is *que*: **Que vous a-t-il dit?* Thus, the risk of producing deviant sentences is very high and erroneous overgeneralizations are common; for example, on the basis of *Comment t'appelles-tu?* 'What's your name?', Myles, Hooper, and Mitchell (1997) have noted for 'What's his name?': *Il s'appelle comment t'appelles-tu?* and *Comment il s'appelles-tu?* All teachers of beginning and intermediate French could add to this collection of bizarre syntactic hybrids. As a general principle, the order in which French WH-interrogative structures should be introduced should match the development of the learners' interlinguistic structures. From that perspective, FRONTING appears to be the most easily learnable construction, at least on the basis of the evidence provided by a study of American beginning university students' production of WH-interrogatives (Valdman 1975, 1976). FRONTING occurred in high proportion in questions these students were made to produce, despite the fact that this variant was absent from the input to which they were exposed. This case of creative construction (Dulay, Burt, and Krashen 1982) identifies FRONTING as a likely candidate for transitional use in early stages of learning. Inferences from a contrastive analysis at the surface level would suggest that anglophone learners also would find EST-CE QUE relatively easy to use. As shown in Figure 2 the semantically void *est-ce que* matches well the position of the equally semantically empty function word *do*.

The ordering of French WH-interrogative constructions as shown in Figure 3 represents the pedagogical norm for the order of their introduction. First, only four variants are selected from the larger set

Figure 2
Linear and semantic correspondances between *est-ce que* and *do*

Where	**does**	John	live?
|	|	|	|
Où	**est-ce que**	Jean	habite?

Figure 3
A dynamic pedagogical norm for WH-interrogatives



occurring in the full range of authentic native speech (see Table 1). Second, exposure of students to the four variants selected from the larger set of attested constructions is carefully controlled. Because it appears easiest to process, FRONTING is introduced as the initial target. But because it is stigmatized, it is progressively replaced by the more neutral EST-CE QUE construction. Concurrently, INVERSION is introduced for written production and more formal oral discourse. In later stages of instruction, all four variants are introduced for recognition and active control, but information is provided about the various sociolinguistic and syntactic restrictions that govern their use.

A case that underscores the primacy of epilinguistic criteria involves variation in German in the placement of modal and auxiliary verbs in subordinate clauses introduced by *weil* 'because'. Descriptive grammars state that these verbs are moved to clause-final position. However, observation of current German vernacular use reveals that in informal style speakers place them before the main verb, see (1):

(1) Ich arbeite weil ich essen muß. — I work because I have to eat.
?Ich arbeite weil ich muß essen.

Sie schläft weil sie müde ist. — She sleeps because she is tired.
?Sie schläft weil sie ist müde.

For English learners the variant without postposition of the modal or auxiliary verb is easier to use. However, as the question marks indicate, speakers of German characterize these as ungrammatical or reflecting an approximate mastery of the language. For that reason, they could only be introduced, as we have proposed for FRONTING WH-questions in French, as an initial provisional step leading toward the use of the more sociolinguistically acceptable variant.

Integrating Grammar and Sociopragmatics

Communicative ability, both in its productive and receptive modes, can be attained only if learners are exposed to a variety of authentic communicative situations and written texts illustrating a broad range of genres and pragmatic situations. A pedagogical grammar compatible with communicatively oriented FL instruction must be solidly anchored in sociopragmatics, that is, it must reflect the functional use of language embedded in communicative situations. In other words, it must be notional-functional in nature, and it must stress the meaning and function of grammatical features rather than their surface form. Inasmuch as in classroom FL instruction a realistic goal is not only interpersonal communication for its own sake, but also the exemplification of how a FL is used to achieve it, accuracy in the use of language cannot be subordinated to the achievement of success in communicating. But accuracy must not be confused with purism or hypercorrection. To eliminate FRONTING and IN SITU constructions from the syllabus because of their erroneous perceived association with lower-class speech would constitute purism since these two constructions are the two most frequent in the spontaneous speech of middle-class speakers; to recommend the use of INVERSION for neutral conversation because it is thought to elevate the style would constitute hypercorrection since targeted native speakers seldom use it in this type of speech.

The discussion of French variant WH-interrogative constructions above suggests that these are synonymous and correlate mainly with social and stylistic factors. Such a narrow view of the significance of language variation for linguistic communication reflects a reductionist determinism associated with early labovian variationist research (Labov 1966). More recently sociolinguists, notably Romaine (1984), Milroy (1982), Le Page & Tabouret-Keller (1985), have stressed that the choices speakers make among variants signal identification with particular social groups and reflect communicative intent. There also has been among sociolinguists a lively debate concerning the applicability of the variationist methodology developed for the study of phonological variation to the syntactic level. Phonological variants are semanticly neutral. Thus, the choice among variants can serve various indexical functions, for example, to indicate membership in a particular social group. On the contrary, syntactic variants serve a broader range of functions in communication. Even though syntactic variants, such as the several French interrogative constructions, may have the same representational meaning (associated with truth value), they differ with regard to their textual or pragmatic value (Romaine 1984, p. 427):

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> It is just as reasonable to say that someone does not know the meaning of a word/expression if he cannot contextualize it as it is to say that he doesn't know the meaning if he doesn't know the truth conditions. The problem with keeping a theory of language use projectionist, i.e. separate from an autonomous linguistic theory which deals with decontextualized or depragmatized system sentences, is that social context and meaning is relegated to a place of secondary importance.

As Fox (1989) and Coveney (1996) have demonstrated, many linguistic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic constraints restrict the particular WH-structure a particular speaker will use in a given communicative interaction. Early descriptions of French interrogatives (Foulet 1921, Fromaigeat 1938) commented on some of the rhetorical and pragmatic differences among variants. For example, Foulet linked INVERSION to a high level of formality ("très correct mais abrupt"), whereas he viewed EST-CE QUE as more neutral. Albeit in a very vague and impressionistic manner, he posited differences along a scale of communicative value: for example, he ranked variants according to what he termed "intensité interrogative," the degree of involvement of the questioner in the information elicited (Fox 1989). He concluded that EST-CE QUE was more likely than FRONTING and INVERSION for requests of clarification. Although the polymorphism of French interrogative constructions has attracted the attention of many syntacticians and sociolinguists (see Fox 1989 and Coveney 1996 for a comprehensive evaluative review of this research), the database is still inadequate to claim that, in all instances, the various WH-structures correlate straightforwardly with particular pragmatic features.

The first step in attempting to determine links between particular variants and pragmatics is to abandon the reductionist view implicit in the term itself; namely, that the primary function of interrogative structures is to formulate questions, to elicit information. This step is taken by Aidan Coveney (1996, p. 116) who proposes a taxonomy of function as shown in Table 4 which, given the dearth of knowledge is primarily heuristic in nature. The next step is to attempt to trace at least some preliminary links between particular variants and certain communicative functions and discourse contexts. The first step in leading learners to observe, and subsequently, acquire sociopragmatic appropriateness in the use of French WH-interrogative variants is to search for functional restrictions.

In the only sociopragmatically oriented empirically based study on this topic, Coveney (1996) found that IN SITU is rarely used for rhetorical and self-questions but that, instead, FRONTING is the

Table 4
Taxonomy of pragmatic functions served by interrogative structures (Adapted from Coveney 1996)

1. **Propositional content of the question**
   - Request for information
     Qu'est-ce que vous faisiez?
   - Multiple queries:
     Il se sont mariés quand?
     Il se sont rencontrés comment?
   - Request for opinion:
     Qu'est-ce que tu en penses?
   - Request for advice:
     Comment fait-on une demande de congé de maladie?
   - Request for action:
     Quand est-ce qu'on part? (equivalent to: Bon, alors, on part? Bon, mettons-nous en route.)
   - Request for clarification:
     On discutait pour savoir qui veut faire du vélo...Vélo c'est quoi?
     C'est faire des randonnées à vélo.
   - Recall:
     Qu'est-ce que j'avais fait l'été dernier?

2. **Relationship between the speaker, the utterance, and the content**
   - Rhetorical questions:
     Qui ne se trompe jamais? (=Tout le monde se trompe quelquefois);
     Mais qu'est-ce vous voulez qu'on fasse? (equivalent to: Il n'y rien à faire.).
   - Echo:
     A: ...et sinon qu'est-ce que tu fais d'autre?
     B: Sinon qu'est-ce que je fais d'autre? A vrai dire je fais pas grand-chose.
   - Echo plus request for clarification ou expression of surprise:
     A: Elle est partie hier.
     B: Elle est partie quand?

3. **Relevant aspects of the knowledge, beliefs, and assumptions of the speaker**
   - Pre-statement of information:
     Tu sais pourquoi il l'a pas eu? Parce qu'il avait oublié de mettre la ceinture.
   - Ritual pre-statement (jokes, riddles, puns, etc.):
     Quelle est la couleur d'un tiroir quand il n'est pas fermé?
     Il est tout vert.
   - Summarizing post-statement:
     Tu vois ce que je veux dire?
   - Introduction of new topic:
     ...l'économat... alors ça consiste en quoi?, eh ben, ça consiste euh. .

Table 5
Pragmatic constraints on the use of IN SITU, FRONTING, and EST-CE QUE WH-interrogatives (adapted from Coveney 1996)

	Information-eliciting questions to others (in %)	Rhetorical and self-questions (in %)
IN SITU	52.6	27.3
FRONTING	18.8	56.0
EST-CE QUE	46.4	46.0

structure indicated for that function. In Table 5, the statistics from Coveney's study show the percentage of use of the variant for the functions indicated. On the other hand, IN SITU is the favored construction for eliciting information from one's interlocutor. Interestingly, EST-CE QUE is used with equal frequency for both functions, which underscores its neutrality.

On the basis of these admittedly limited data, one may extend the pedagogical norm to guide learners in producing pragmatically appropriate WH-interrogatives.

- Use EST-CE QUE and FRONTING for rhetorical and self-questions:
  Un bon professeur qu'est-ce qu'il désire?
  What does a good teacher wish?

  Et bien, il voudrait que ses
  Well, s/he wants his/her students

  élèves apprennent bien.
  to learn well.
  *.....il désire quoi?

  Zut, où (est-ce qu'il) il habite?
  Darn, where does he live?
  * ...il habite où?
- Use IN SITU or EST-CE QUE for information-eliciting questions to co-locutor:
  Elle s'appelle comment?
  What's her name?

  Il l'a rencontrée où?
  He met her where?
  Quand est-ce qu'ils se sont mariés?
  When did they get married?

Pedagogical Effectiveness of the Pedagogical Norm

Variation in the French Mid-Vowel System and the *Loi de Position*

Does the use of the pedagogical norm result in closer approximation to target norms on the part of learner than approaches that do not attempt to modify input? The effectiveness of the pedagogical norm was explored by a pilot study focusing on a phonological variable of French, the *è* variable. This variable, arguably one of the best studied in French variationist phonology (Gueunier, Genouvrier, and Khomsi 1978; Léon 1972), involves the production of a vowel ranging from [e] to [ɛ]. It is for that reason that to test the pedagogical efficacy of the pedagogical norm we selected that variable feature for an experimental study.

To put this phonological variable in perspective, it will be useful to review briefly variation in the French mid-vowel system. In SF there are six mid-vowel phonemes, as validated by the contrastive pairs in (2):

(2) le pré [pRe] 'meadow' — le prêt [pRɛ] 'loan'
les jeûnes [ʒøn] ' fasts' — les jeunes [ʒœn] 'young people'
la paume [pom] 'palm' — la pomme [pɔm] 'apple'

However, the occurrence of these six phonemes is subject to various limitations depending in part on the syllabic environment. The front unrounded mid vowel [e] does not occur in checked (CVC) syllables so that such sequences as *[bel] do not occur. This has been saliently illustrated by the unpronounceable nature of the neologism *mél* *[mel] for e-mail address. Accordingly, [e] and [ɛ] do not contrast in this type of syllable. The front and back rounded vowels, respectively [ø, œ] and [o, ɔ], contrast primarily in checked syllables; the low-mid members of these pairs do not occur in free (CV) syllables, see (3).

(3) Free syllables (CV)	Checked syllables (CVC)
pré [pRe]	———
prêt [pRɛ]	prête [pRɛt]
pot [po] 'pot'	paume [pom]
———	pomme [pɔm]
jeu [ʒø] 'game'	jeûnes [ʒøn]
———	jeunes ʒœn]

As would be expected, there is considerable variation correlating with geographical, social, and stylistic factors not unlike those that affect the choice of interrogative structures discussed in Section 3. In southern France, an area where Occitan dialects were and are still spoken, generally, speakers do not contrast between the high-mid and low-mid members of these three pairs of mid vowels. For them these

are in complementary distribution: the high-mid member of each pair occurs in CV syllables and the low-mid member in CVC syllables; this is shown in (4):

(4) Free syllables (CV)	Checked syllables (CVC)
pré [pRe], prêt [pRe]	
	prête [pRɛt]
pot [po] 'pot'	
	pomme [pɔm], paume [pɔm]
jeu [ʒø] 'game'	
	jeunes [ʒœn], jeûnes [ʒœn]

This type of distribution traditionally is termed the Loi de Position: open syllable (CV) —> high-mid (close) vowel [e ø o], checked syllable (CVC) —> low-mid (open) vowel [ɛœ ɔ].

The Loi de Position characterizes the vernacular speech of southern (Méridional) French speakers, as well as, in a somewhat different manner, those in other parts of the country. As would be expected, there is considerable variation, speakers alternating between their vernacular norm and that of the prestigious SF. An important sociolinguistic consideration is that in CVC syllables such pronunciations as [pɔm] instead of [pom] for *paume* and as [ʒœn] instead of [ʒøn] for *jeûnes* are stigmatized. Indeed, they constitute a widespread stereotype of the Méridional accent in French. Applying the sociopsychological criterion of the pedagogical norm, namely, that it should conform to native speakers' idealized views of their speech and the perceptions both native speakers and foreign learners have regarding expected behavior of particular foreign users, adherence to the SF norm in these cases would be required of foreign learners. In other words, they would be expected NOT to follow the Loi de Position and instead to produce the high-mid vowels in CVC syllables, for example [pom] and not [pɔm] for *paume* and [ʒøn] and not [ʒœn] for *jeûnes*. Because instances of the high-mid vowels [o] and [ø] in CVC are relatively infrequent and relatively predictable—for example [o] usually occurs before [z] (*la chose* 'the thing', *la pause* 'the pause'), see Valdman (1993) —this does not pose a major pedagogical problem.

The situation is quite different for the front unrounded pair [e] versus [ɛ]. The use of the high-mid vowel [e] in free syllables according to the Loi de Position is not stigmatized; in fact, it is the most widespread pronunciation throughout France. Even speakers of SF vary widely in their use of [e] or [ɛ] in nonfinal syllables, that is, they pronounce *maison* as [mezõ] or [mɛzõ] and *rester* as [Reste] or [Rɛste]. Despite the fact that the production of the low-mid front unrounded vowel [ɛ] characterizes the speech of a minority of French speakers,

the traditional approach in the teaching of French as a foreign language involves requiring students to produce contrasts such as *le pré* [e] 'meadow' versus *le prêt* [ɛ] 'loan'. In American English, in CV syllables, matching the three French unrounded front vowel phonemes [i e ɛ], there are only two contrasts (*sea* versus *say*). In addition, vowels occurring in final CV syllables are glided in English whereas those of French are tense and unglided. These differences between the French and American English vowel systems lead to serious learning difficulties for American learners of French, particularly because the vowel [ɛ] is highly frequent. Thus, the *è* variable occurs in the imperfect and conditional endings, as well as in a large number of lexemes. Table 6 provides verbal contrasts involving these two tenses as well as sample orthographic representations of SF [ɛ].

The Loi de Position as a Pedagogical Norm

Beginning American learners find it difficult to differentiate [e] and [ɛ] in CV syllables and, in addition, they tend to produce both vowels, especially [e], with a final glide. A pedagogical norm would involve treating the two phones as variants in complementary distribution because that pronunciation is both attested and not stigmatized. Initially, the focus would be on the production of the two variants without a glide. The gradual progression toward the SF norm would involve memorizing exceptions to the Loi de Position, first the imperfect and conditional endings *-ais*, *-ait* and *aient*. Learners would be trained to produce grammatical contrasts such as *il a parlé* 'he spoke' vs. *il parlait* 'he used to speak' and *j'irai* 'I will go' vs. *j'irais* 'I would go.' Next, they would associate individual morphemes with reference to orthographic representations, such as *-ai* (*balai* 'broom'), *-aid* (*laid* 'ugly'), *-et* (*piquet* 'post').

Table 6
Forms containing the *è* variable

Forms with [ɛ]	Forms with [e]
je parlais 'I used to speak, impf.'	j'ai parlé 'I spoke, past perfect'
je parlerais 'I would speak, cond.'	je parlerai 'I will speak, fut.'
le marais 'marsh'	la marée 'tide'
la baie 'bay'	bouche bée 'tongue tied'
le grès 'sandstone'	le gré 'liking'
le prêt 'loan'	le pré 'meadow'

Table 7
Forms containing the French variable 'è' ([é]—[è])

	Sentence-reading
(1)	J'ai porté un *bérêt.*
(2)	Il est venu par les *marais.*
(3)	Elle se *dépêchait* pour aller à la banque.
(4)	Je *ferai* mes devoirs *après* lui avoir téléphoné.
(5)	S'ils le *voulaient*, tu *pourrais* partir avec eux.
(6)	En *effet*, on *voulait fêter* son anniversaire.
(7)	Tu vas *balayer* toute la *maison.*
(8)	Elle aime certains *aspects* de l'humour *français.*
(9)	Vous avez dessiné un mouton à la *craie.*
(10)	Ferme la porte *s'il te plaît.*
(11)	On a *fait* des *progrès* en histoire.
(12)	Cet enfant a *pleuré* toute la journée.

In a rigorous study that adopted Labov's early variationist data-collecting protocols, Gueunier and her associates (1978) discovered that the *è* variable functions as a marker, that is, it is sensitive to social as well as stylistic factors, the occurrence of the standard variant [ɛ] varying from 55% in formal style to 5% in informal style for the subjects as a whole. In addition to the fact that such studies with a representative group of French speakers provide a baseline reference, the *è* variable was selected for our study because of its arbitrary nature, that is, the alternation between the two phones is not determined by their relative naturalness, and because it is represented by the standard orthography in a relatively transparent manner.

The data–collection procedures of the Gueunier, Genouvrier, and Khomsi (1978) study were applied to a study of the reproduction of words containing the *è* variable on the part of two groups of advanced American learners at Indiana University: a group of 7 graduate instructors in French and 31 undergraduate students enrolled in an advanced course in French conversation containing a major pronunciation component incorporating the Loi de Position as part of a pedagogical norm for the pronunciation of [ɛ]. A control group of 11 native speakers of southern accent French (*français méridional*) whose pronunciation is characterized by the *Loi de Position* was recruited consisting of MA-level students at the University of Nice.

To obtain samples of attended speech influenced by the orthography deemed to represent the most formal level, subjects of all three groups were asked to read the sentences in Table 7. These contained 18 instances of the variable (appearing in italics). The last sentence, which does not contain any instance of the variable, was inserted as a control for the potential hypercorrect pronunciation of the invariable *é*, produced uniformly as [e]. All subjects were invited to make auto-evaluative and normative judgments about paired renditions of the same utterance, one containing the standard prononciation of the variable, i.e. [ɛ], and the other the deviant pronunciation [e]. Specifically, they were to indicate which of the two renditions represented their habitual pronunciation and which they preferred. The comparison of these two sets of judgments with the production data yielded an index of linguistic insecurity: the more their evaluative judgments differed from their production in the direction of the standard norm, the greater the index of linguistic insecurity. In all tasks requiring a judgment, subjects were provided with the spelling of the words

Table 8
Production, perception and evaluation of the 'è' variable by advanced American learners

Subject	Directed conversation (in %)	Sentence reading (in %)	Perception	Estimated use (in %)	Preference (in %)
2–6	39	72 (+33)	2/6 2/5	44	40
2–9	44	71 (+27)	2/6 3/5	67	40
2–8	46	56 (+10)	2/6 3/5	75	83
2–10	44	47 (+3)	3/6 3/5	63	71
1–1	23	44 (+19)	4/6 2/5	89	86
1–3	12	24 (+12)	3/6 2/5	56	33
2–7	54	24 (–30)	3/6 2/6	63	71
Group Average	37	48	19/42 = 45% 17/35 = 49%	65	64

Table 9
Comparison of use of 'è' variable by advanced American learners and Southern (Nice) French speakers

	Native speakers from Nice (in %)	American graduate French instructors (in %)	American undergraduate students (in %)
Sentence reading	11	48	62
Sound discrimination	77	45	68
Sound-word correspondence	71	49	54
Estimated use	36	65	42
Preference	39	64	47

containing the variable. The subjects' ability to distinguish the two realizations of the variable was tested by two different discrimination tasks. In addition, directed interviews were conducted with graduate student instructors by two native speaker peers; instances of the variables were transcribed by two advanced students of French linguistics and checked by this author.

As shown in Table 8, as a group, the graduate instructors evidenced sensitivity to the *è* variable as a sociolinguistic marker: the proportion of the standard realization rose from 37% to 48% with the shift to reading style. The difference between the two styles was much narrower than that of Gueunier, Genouvrier, and Khomsi's (1978) Tours sample; note, however, the wide range of individual performance on the various tasks.

Table 9 presents a comparison of the performance of the two advanced learner groups and the native speaker (NS) sample. The NS group demonstrated more accurate discrimination between [e] and [ɛ] than the two learner groups despite the fact that, because their pronunciation follows the Loi de Position, they do not habitually distinguish between these two phonemes of SF. The undergraduate learners, who had phonetic training incorporating the notion of the pedagogical norm, proved to be less puristic than the instructors; both their scores in the estimation of use and preference matched more closely that of the NS sample. More important, they attained greater discriminative accuracy, and they were able to produce the valorized variant more consistently in the reading style. In summary, instructed learning that took into account sociolinguistic factors about a feature of French

pronunciation resulted in: (1) more accurate performance and (2) less puristic attitudes toward language variation.

Conclusion

In this article, it was suggested that an invariant TL norm, based on the planned discourse of educated and cultivated TL speakers, is both elusive and illusory as a target for learners, especially at the beginning and intermediate levels. To speak like a native requires the ability to select among several norms on the basis of the total situational context and in light of varying communicative intents. In addition, the norms for prestigious planned speech are usually complexified with respect to those that characterize vernacular unplanned speech. At the phonological level, they require finer discriminations; at the grammatical level, they involve numerous lower-level and highly specific constraints. Consequently, to approximate these norms learners are likely to produce more deviant forms, both inaccurate from a linguistic perspective and inappropriate from a sociopragmatic one. A more realistic and satisfactory solution to reduce the variation inherent in language is constructed pedagogical norms. These norms are dynamic and offer learners changing targets that lead them progressively toward the full range of TL variants.

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